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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9591
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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AMCONSUL DANANG
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
USDEL FRANCE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 14283

SUBJ: THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION -- DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LAST FEW DAYS

REF: OPS CENTER TELECON

1. SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION. DESPITE WIDESPREAD DISCOURAGEMENT AND CONCERN IN POLITICAL CIRCLES OVER THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS, ACCOMPANIED BY SHARP PRESS CRITICISM OF THIEU AND THE UNITED STATES, SO FAR THERE HAVE BEEN NO DISORDERS AND ONLY SLIGHT INDICATION OF RISE IN PUBLIC TENSIONS, WHILE MINH REVERTED TO SILENCE, KY CAME BACK ON STAGE SEPTEMBER 3 WITH INTEMPERATE AND BELLIGERENT REMARKS AGAINST THIEU WHICH KY'S SPOKESMAN SUBSEQUENTLY SOUGHT TO DENY. POLITICAL GROUPS, CONSTRUCTIVELY, ALTHOUGH BELATEDLY, ARE ADVANCING A VARIETY (1) OF PROPOSALS ON REORGANIZAING THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. THIEU MEANWHILE WENT ABOUT STRENGTHENING SECURITY AND REINFORCING THE LOYALTY OF THE GENERALS THROUGH A SERIES OF PROMOTIONS AND APPOINTMENTS.

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2. LOCAL PRESS VIEWS THE AMERICANS. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS HAVE RESULTED IN HEAVY CRITICISM BY THE OPPOSITION PRESS OF BOTH THE THIEU ADMINISTRATION AND ALSO THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT. THE OPPOSITION PRESS, WHICH HAS CONTINUED TO PUBLISH ARTICLES, EDITORIALS, AND CARTOONS CRITICAL OF U.S. POLICY, HAS LATELY BEEN FOCUSING MUCH CRITICAL ATTENTION ON AMBASSADOR BUNKER. ADMINISTRATION NEWSPAPERS (THERE ARE NOW ABOUT TEL) HAVE INCLUDED U.S. IN THEIR CRITICISM, WHICH SEEMS TO BE TURNED ON AND OFF AS THE SITUATION DEMANDS. IT IS NOW AIMED AT VICE PRESIDENT KY AND HIS RESIGNATION PROPOSAL.

3. KY: VICE PRESIDENT KY'S BELLIGERENT REMARKS TO FOREIGN REPORTERS THE EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 3 (REF SAIGON 14233) HAVE NOW BEEN WIDELY CARRIED IN THE VIETNAMESE PRESS. ADMINISTRATION-LINKED NEWSPAPERS IN COMMENTING ON THE VICE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS, HAVE BEGUN TERMING THEM AS "JUST LIKE THE THREATS OF THE COMMUNISITS." AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS WHO ATTENDED THE BACKGROUNDER HAVE GIVEN US VARYING INTERPRETATIONS OF WHY KY SPOKE SO HARSHLY, SOME HAVING THE IMPRESSION KY DID IT DELIBERATELY IN ORDER TO INCITE THIEU TO OVERREACTION, OTHERS THINKING IT WAS JUST KY'S EXUBERANCE OF THE MOMENT. ONE REPORTER REMARKED TO US KY SEEMED TO BECOME BORED WITH THE RATHER MODERATE REMARKS HE HAD BEEN MAKING FOR ABOUT 45 MINUTES, AND LET FLY. NGUYEN NGOC LINH, A LONG-TIME KY ASSOCIATE WHO WAS PRESENT, WAS SAID TO HAVE CRINGED VISIBLY. SINCE THE BACKGROUNDER, KY'S STAFF HAS BEEN TAKING PAINS TO EXPLAIN AWAY KY'S REMARKS. (REF SAIGON 14275). WHEN ASKED ABOUT KY'S STATEMENTS BY THE PRESS AT THE OPENING OF THE VI DAN HOSPITAL SEPTEMBER 4, PRESIDENT THIEU DECLINED TO COMMENT, SAYING HE WAS WAITING FOR "AUTHENTIC WORD."

4. VIETNAM PRESS REPORTED SEPTEMBER 4 THAT THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR HAD RETURNED THE TWO MILLION PIEASTER DEPOSIT TOTHE KY-LE SLATE.

5. WHILE KY WAS VISITING NHA TRANG SEPTEMBER 4, A 55 YEAR OLD WAR VETERAN ATTEMPTED TO IMMOLATE HIMSELF BUT IS REPORTEDLY STILL ALIVE IN A HOSPITAL. ALSO, ACCORDING TO THE LOCAL PRESS, KY TOLD A NUMBER OF VETERANS WHO VOLUNTEERED TO COMMIT SUICIDE IN KY'S SUPPORT THAT THEY SHOULD NOT SACRIFICE THEMSELVES.

6. NOTHING FURTHER HAS BEEN HEARD FROM MINH SINCE HIS SEPTEMBER

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1 DENIAL OF HAVING ASKED THE AMERICANS TO CONDUCT THE ELECTION.

7. PROPOSALS ON THE ELECTIONS; THE EXTENT OF POLITICAL CONCERN HERE OVER THE FORTHCOMING UNCONTESTED ELECTION IS INDICATED BY THE NUMBER OF PROPOSALS NOW BEING ADVANCED FOR REORGANIZING THE ELECTION. ELEVEN PARTIES AND GROUPS, SOME NORMALLY PRO-ADMINISTRATION, PUT OUT A COMMUNIQUE SEPTEMBER 3 DEMANDING THIEU'S RESIGNATION AND NEW, FAIR ELECTIONS (REF SAIGON 14233).
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8. ANOTHER EIGHT-MEMBER GROUP, WITH THREE OVERLAPPING WITH THE ABOVE, ALSO ISSUED A RESOLUTION SEPTEMBER 3. THIS GROUPING, GENERALLY CONSERVATIVE AND PRO-THIEU, IS LED BY LAWYER LE TRONG QUAT (FORMER DEPUTY MINISTER OF INFORMATION) AND INCLUDES HIS NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION FORCE, THE VNQDD KHANH FACTION, THE VIETNAM RESTORATION PARTY (HOANG CO BINH), THE NATIONAL RESTORATION ALLIANCE (BUI VAN SET), THE REVOLUTIONARY MEM OF LETTERS (DINH SON), AND THE CATHOLIC PEOPLES PROGRESSIVE FORCE (FATHER HOANG QUYNG). THE ESSENCE OF THEIR PROPOSAL IS A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO POSTPONE THE ELECTION AND ESTABLISH A FAIRMINDED ELECTION COMMISSION. THERE WOULD ALSO BE PROVISION FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES SPONSORED BY THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND VARIOUS OTHER CONDITIONS DES GNED TO ENSURE A CREDITABLE ELECTION. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GROUP CLAIM THEY CAN GAIN MAJORITY SUPPORT IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR THEIR PROPOSAL AND HAVE COME TO US FOR ASSISTANCE. WE INFORMED THEM THIS IS A MATTER FOR CONCERNED VIETNAMESE TO WORK OUT FOR THEMSELVES.

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9. OTHER PROPOSALS INCLUDE: (A) MILDLY OPPOSITIONIST CATHOLIC (AND JUST DEFETAED) DEPUTY NGUYEN KHAC TAN'S PLAN FOR A NEW ELECTION LAW TO BE CONSIDERED BY A SPECIAL SESSION OF THE LOWER HOUSE WHICH WOULD PROVIDE FOR THE ELECTION BEING HELD AS SCHEDULED; A CAMPAIGN PERIOD OF TEN DAYS BEFORE ELECTION DAY; THE ENDORSEMENT PROVISION ABOLISHED; AND THIEU, KY, MINH AND NGUYEN TRAN ALL QUALIFIED AS CANDIDATES. (B) DEPUTY NGO CONG DUC'S FOUR POINT PROPOSAL OF SIMULTANEOUS RESIGNATIONS OF THIEU AND KY; CHAIRMAN HUYEN TO TAKE THE PRESIDENCY; JGS CHAIRMAN GEN. VIEN TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER ASSURE NATIONAL ORDER; AND AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION TO "MEET THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE PEOPLE AND FIT THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE NATION."

10. WHILE THESE VARIOUS PROPOSALS ALL MAKE SOME SENSE AND GIVE THE POLITICIANS EXERCISE, MOST HAVE COME TO LIGHT AFTER THIEU ANNOUNCED HIS DECISION ON SEPTEMBER 2 AND THERE IS NO INDICATION THIEU IS BEING INFLUENCED BY THEM TO CHANGE HIS MIND. WITHOUT HIS CONCURRENCE, THERE SEEMS NO CHANCE THAT ANY WILL BEAR FRUIT.

11. PRESIDENT THIEU HAS INDICATED TO THE PRESS THAT HE WILL BE HOLDING A PRESS CONFERENCE WITHIN THE WEEK TO CLARIFY THE CONDITIONS AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ELECTION ON OCTOBER 3.

12. REINFORCING SECURITY AND LOYALTY: THE CHANGE OF COMMAND CEREMONY IN WHICH CIO DIRECTOR COL. NGUYEN KHAC BINH REPLACED MAJ. GEN. TRAN THANH PHONG AS NATIONAL POLICE COMMANDER TOOK PLACE SEPTEMBER 4. (REF SAIGON 14234) AND WAS DULY RECORDED IN THE PRESS, SO FAR WITHOUT EXTENSIVE COMMENT.

13. SEMI-OFFICIAL VIET-NAM PRESS ANNOUNCED SEPTEMBER 4 THAT, BESIDES PROMOTING NGO DZU TO LT. GEN., (REF SAIGON 14227), PRESIDENT THIEU HAD SIGNED A DECREE REVOKING A 1967 DECREE DISMISSING LT. GEN. NGUYEN HUU CO FOR DISCIPLINARY REASONS, THUS ALLOWING CO TO ENJOY THE STATUS OF OFFICERS NORMALLY RETIRED. CO WAS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER/DEFENSE MINISTER WHEN FIRED FOR REASONS OF POWER RIVALRY BY THEN PRIME MINISTER KY DURING A STATE VISIT BY CO TO THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA. THIEU ALLOWED CO TO RETURN FROM HONG KONG EXILE IN 1970, AND HE IS NOW A SUCCESSFUL SAIGON BANKER. HIS PARTIAL REINSTATEMENT SEEMS AN INTERESTING EXAMPLE OF PRESIDENT THIEU'S CURRENT EFFORTS TO SHOW THE GENERALS HE WILL TAKE CARE OF THEIR

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INTERESTS IF THEY WILL TAKE CARE OF HIS.

14. DISSATISFACTION WITH THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS AND THE STRONG TENDENCY IN THE PRESS TO TRANSFER PART OF THE BLAME TO THE U.S. HAS NOT TO DATE RESULTED IN PUBLIC UNREST OR IN ANY MARKED RISE OF ANTI-AMERICAN ACTS.
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ANALYSIS BRANCH

FROM : Amembassy SAIGON

DATE: September 9, 1971

SUBJECT : Labor's Pre-Election Mood

REF : Saigon A-145

Pol 14 Viets
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1. Quiet reigns on the labor scene in Vietnam, with no strikes or threats of strikes. This situation is normal for September, which does not fall within Vietnam's two "seasons" for labor demands (the weeks following May Day and the weeks preceding Tet).

2. The unions are not completely inactive. In the Saigon area, for example, workers of Vinnell Corp., a U.S. government contractor, have for the first time formed a union, and, through the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor (CVT), have asked for a meeting with management. In the border province of Chau Doc, the CVT is running a two-week leadership seminar, attended by 30 unionists, under the sponsorship of the Asian-American Free Labor Institute, the AFL-CIO arm in Asia.

3. Except for such scattered activities, however, the labor movement is in the doldrums. Even the Committee for Income Tax Reduction, a loosely organized group of militant unions, has decided that now isn't the time to agitate--it will wait for the next session of the National Assembly, opening next month, rather than pressuring the executive as it has before.

4. This is a time of "wait and see" especially because of the Presidential election scheduled for October 3. Few labor leaders, and fewer still of their constituents, are enamored of President Thieu, and they are generally uneasy about a one-man race. Bui Luong, general secretary of the Vietnamese Confederation of Free Trade Unions (CGSL), on September 3 joined others in a public

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